



FIRST FOCUS

MAKING CHILDREN & FAMILIES THE PRIORITY

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May 7, 2018

The Honorable Jeb Hensarling
Chair, House Financial Services Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
2129 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Maxine Waters
Ranking Member, House Financial
Services Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
4340 O'Neill House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sean P. Duffy
Chair, Housing and Insurance Subcommittee
House Financial Services Committee
2129 Rayburn House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Emmanuel Cleaver
Ranking Member, Housing and Insurance
Subcommittee
House Financial Services Committee
2335 Rayburn House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Hensarling, Ranking Member Waters, Subcommittee Chairman Duffy and Ranking Member Cleaver:

I am writing from First Focus, a national bipartisan children's advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families a priority in federal budget and policy decisions, to express concern over the legislative discussion draft, Promoting Resident Opportunity through Rent Reform Act (PROTRRA).

As an organization dedicated to promoting housing stability and economic security for families with children, we are greatly concerned that the changes in this discussion draft would cause many families to lose access to housing assistance and experience homelessness.

Affordable housing remains one of the main barriers to economic stability for many families. Housing costs continue to increase in the United States, yet family income has not kept pace. One-third of U.S. children live in households with a high housing cost burden, defined as spending more than 30 percent of the household's monthly income on housing.ⁱ

Housing instability, which includes situations such as being behind on rent and making multiple moves, is associated with an increased risk of poor child health, including hospitalizations as well as an increased risk of maternal depression.ⁱⁱ Sustained housing instability can lead to homelessness, which can further destabilize families, causing trauma with severe negative implications for children's healthy development and educational achievement.ⁱⁱⁱ

Access to housing assistance remains extremely limited—only one in four families who are eligible for rent assistance in the United States receive it. We are very concerned that this discussion draft would further limit access to housing assistance for millions of low-income families with children through allowing public housing authorities to increase rent for tenants, remove deductions on income calculations for medical expenses and child care costs, and impose work requirements.

Most households receiving housing assistance have at least one family member that is working and if not, the household is already subject to existing work requirements.^{iv} Therefore, rather than promoting economic security, imposing work requirements for housing assistance instead just adds another layer of bureaucracy by requiring families to now document their existing employment.

Since most low-income, hourly workers have no control over their schedule or the number of shifts they are assigned, documenting steady employment would pose a major barrier for many families in maintaining housing assistance.

Increased rents and the elimination of the deduction for child care costs would cause housing to be unaffordable for many and lead to an increase in child, youth and family homelessness. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimates that increasing the minimum rent for households would put a million children at risk of homelessness.^v Child and youth homelessness is already skyrocketing, with 1.3 million students identified as homeless^{vi} by the U.S. Department of Education.

In order to actually help families achieve economic security, we should make further investments in evidence-based job training programs, higher education, affordable childcare, and transportation infrastructure. When it comes to increasing access to stable housing, we need to increase rental assistance, expand access to civil legal services^{vii} for families facing evictions and other housing disputes, and build upon programs that pair housing with wraparound services. This includes increasing and building upon partnerships^{viii} between public housing authorities and public school systems designed to improve the educational outcomes of children living in subsidized housing.

We look forward to working with you on this and other proposals to improve the well-being of America's children and youth.

Sincerely,



Bruce Lesley
President

XC: Members of the House Financial Services Committee

ⁱ Annie E. Casey Foundation, "Children Living in Households with a High Housing Cost Burden, KIDS COUNT Data Book, available at: <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/7244-children-living-in-households-with-a-high-housing-cost-burden?loc=1&loc=1&loc=1&loc=1#detailed/1/any/false/573,869,36,868,867/any/14287>.

ⁱⁱ Sandel, Megan, Sheward, Richard, Ettinger de Cuba, Stephanie, Coleman, Sharon M., Frank, Deborah A., Chilton, Mariana, Black, Maureen, Heeren, Timothy, Pasquariello, Justin, Casey, Patrick, Ochoa, Eduardo, Cutts, Diana, *Unstable Housing and Caregiver and Child Health in Renter Families*, Pediatrics, January 2018, available: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2018/01/18/peds.2017-2199>

ⁱⁱⁱ Andersson, Fredrik, Haltiwanger, John C., Kutzbach, Mark J., Palloni, Giordano E., Pollakowski, Henry O., Weinberg, Daniel H., *Childhood Housing and Adult Earnings: A Between-Siblings Analysis of Housing Vouchers and Public Housing*, Working Paper, National Bureau of Economic Research, October 2016, available at: <http://www.nber.org/papers/w22721.pdf>.

^{iv} Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Fact Sheet: Federal Rental Assistance, United States, March 30, 2017, available at: <https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/4-13-11hou-US.pdf>.

^v Mazzara, Alicia, "Trump Plan to Raise Minimum Rents Would Put Nearly a Million Children at Risk of Homelessness," The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, April 27, 2018, available at: <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/trump-plan-to-raise-minimum-rents-would-put-nearly-a-million-children-at-risk-of-homelessness-0>.

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- ^{vi} National Center for Homeless Education, University of North Carolina at Greenboro, *Federal Data Summary: School Years 2013-14 to 2015-16*, December 2017, available at: <https://nche.ed.gov/downloads/data-comp-1314-1516.pdf>
- ^{vii} Baldari, Cara and Torres, Kristen, Fact Sheet: Equal Opportunity for Residential Representation Act of 2017, First Focus Campaign for Children, July 2017, available at: <https://campaignforchildren.org/resources/fact-sheet/equal-opportunity-for-residential-representation-act-of-2017-h-r-1146/>.
- ^{viii} Schoolhouse Connection, “School-Housing Partnership Legislation Introduced,” October 13, 2017, available at: <https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/school-housing-partnership-legislation-introduced/>.